

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-12

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9922

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, PK

SUBJECT: PUNJAB CHIEF MINISTER KHAR RESIGNS; RAMAY TO REPLACE

REF: LAHORE 0124

BEGIN SUMMARY: KHAR HAS RESIGNED AS PUNJAB CHIEF MINISTER.
BHUTTO HAS DESIGNATED POPULAR FINANCE MINISTER RAMAY AS REPLACE-
MENT, POSSIBLY IN EFFORT TO HEAL GROWING PARTY DIVISIONS AND
RECREATE UNITY JEOPARDIZED BY KHAR'S HEAVY-HANDED TREATMENT
DURING RECENT MONTHS OF PARTY MEMBERS WHO DISAGREED WITH HIM.
RAMAY IS PROBABLY GOOD CHOICE. END SUMMARY.

1. GHULAM MOSTAFA KHAR RESIGNED AS CHIEF MINISTER OF PUNJAB
PROVINCE ON SUNDAY NIGHT, MARCH 10. FOLLOWING MORNING,
MARCH 11, MOHAMMAD HANEEF RAMAY, FINANCE MINISTER IN KHAR'S
CABINET, TOLD REPORTERS AT LAHORE AIRPORT AFTER DEPARTURE OF
PRIME MINISTER FOR LARKANA THAT BHUTTO HAD DESIGNATED HIM
CHIEF MINISTER TO REPLACE KHAR AND HAD ASKED HIM TO FORM A NEW
GOVT IN PUNJAB.

2. RAMAY TOLD REPORTERS THAT MEMBERS OF KHAR'S CABINET NO
LONGER HELD OFFICE AS OF TIME OF KHAR'S RESIGNATION, ALTHOUGH
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KHAR WOULD CONTINUE AS CARETAKER CHIEF EXECUTIVE UNTIL HE,

RAMAY, WAS ELECTED BY PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY IN ACCORDANCE WITH PROVISIONS OF CONSTITUTION. NOTIFICATION FOR CONVENING OF ASSEMBLY IS BEING ISSUED MARCH 12. ASSEMBLY ACTION MUST COME WITHIN 14 DAYS.

3. WHILE KHAR LEFT LAHORE WITH BHUTTO'S PARTY, LOCAL PRESS AND POLITICAL CIRCLES TRADED LATEST REPORTS AND GOSSIP WITH RELISH. KHAR, RUMORS HAD IT, WOULD BE TAKEN INTO CENTRAL CABINET OR WOULD BE SENT ABROAD AS AMBASSADOR, PERHAPS TO DACCA. ONE OPPOSITION PAPER REPORTED THAT ELEMENTS AMONG PPP LEGISLATORS IN PUNJAB URGED BHUTTO TO KEEP KHAR OUT OF PUNJAB UNTIL NEW GOVT IS FORMED. OTHER REPORTS CLAIMED THAT RETIRING CHIEF MINISTER WAS RETURNING FROM LARKANA IMMEDIATELY.

4. PRIMARY NEWS COVERAGE, HOWEVER, WAS ON RAMAY. PAPERS CARRIED LISTS OF NAMES OF MPA'S ARRIVING TO CONGRATULATE FORMER FINANCE MINISTER. RAMAY WAS REPORTED TO HAVE CALLED ON LEADER OF OPPOSITION AND TO HAVE BEGUN DISCUSSIONS WITH SENIOR PPP LEADERS OF MAKE-UP OF HIS NEW CABINET. HE TOLD APP IN LAHORE THAT HE WILL NOT PRACTICE PARTIALITY OR DISCRIMINATION IN DEALING WITH MPA'S AND PARTY MEMBERS AND MADE A POINT THAT HE "BORE NO PERSONAL GRUDGE, RANCOUR OR ACRIMONY AGAINST ANYONE." HE PLEDGED HIMSELF TO ADMINISTER PROVINCE IN ACCORDANCE WITH PPP MANIFESTO UNDER BHUTTO'S GUIDANCE AND IN CONFORMITY WITH CONSTITUTION.

5. COMMENT: KHAR'S DEPARTURE IS NO GREAT SURPRISE (SEE REFTTEL) ALTHOUGH MOST OF US THOUGHT HE MIGHT SURVIVE SOMEWHAT LONGER; HE WAS DOING BUSINESS AS USUAL OVER PAST WEEKEND AND SAT CONSPICUOUSLY NEAR PRIME MINISTER DURING FINAL SESSIONS OF PUNJAB PEOPLES' FESTIVAL (HORSE SHOW) ON SUNDAY. BHUTTO HAS APPARENTLY MANAGED TO MOVE HIM OUT OF THE TOP UNJAB GOVT JOB WITHOUT LOSING KHAR'S LOYALTY WHICH HAS BEEN PROVERBIAL. PRIME MINISTER'S CHOICE OF RAMAY IS POPULAR ONE AND MAY WELL REFLECT BHUTTO'S FEELING THAT TIME HAS COME IN PUNJAB FOR LEADERSHIP THAT WILL HEAL PARTY DIVISIONS AND RECREATE UNITY WHICH HAS BEEN JEOPARDIZED DURING LAST MONTHS OF KHAR'S RULE. KHAR'S HEAVY-HANDED AND RUTHLESS SMASHING OF HIS ENEMIES WAS HIGHLY USEFUL TO BHUTTO UNTIL, SAY, LAST AUTUMN WHEN OPPOSITION HAD BEEN BROKEN AS ANY GENUINE THREAT TO PPP. HOWEVER, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AS PPP REORGANIZATION SUBSEQUENTLY GOT UNDER WAY, AND INFIGHTING BEGAN WITHIN PARTY, KHAR'S USE OF SIMILAR TACTICS AGAINST DISSENTING PARTY COLLEAGUES BECAME INCREASINGLY DISRUPTIVE. OUR JUDGMENT IS THAT RAMAY, IS BROADER GAUGED, MORE SOPHISTICATED, MORE OF NATIONAL CALIBER THAN HIS PREDECESSOR WHOSE MAIN CLAIM TO FAME WAS COMBINATION OF SLAVISH LOYALTY TO BHUTTO AND MASTERY OF ROUGH AND TUMBLE OF PUNJAB PROVINCIAL POLITICS.

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